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COMMISSIONERS PROVIDE FOR PATHWAY FROM POVERTY

The Franklin County Board of Commissioners began the first part of its new People Works program on Tuesday, aimed at helping low-income residents secure good jobs and begin climbing the ladder from poverty. People Works is the latest in the commissioners' Smart Works suite of economic development initiatives, and joins the Infrastructure Works and Downtown Works programs, which are aimed at public infrastructure to jumpstart development and the revitalization of Central Ohio Main Streets, respectively. People Works kicks off with a 3-year, \$100,000 grant to Connect Ohio, which will provide training in IT and Customer Service, as well as job placement services to 100 Franklin County Residents.

"The most important and most exciting part of my job as commissioner is to make a real difference in someone's life, and People Works does just that," said Board of Commissioners President, Marilyn Brown. "It is a direct help to local residents and families, connecting them to training, job placement, and ongoing employment services that enable them to not only get a job, but to create and maintain a career. No other program does that, and I'm proud that my office has spearheaded this innovative way to help our residents succeed."

The training is designed to meet the needs of both its participants and local and national employers, and Connect Ohio describes its program as a six-week Customer Service and IT boot camp, and as a career pathway out of poverty. Following training, Connect Ohio will work directly with employers to place the newly trained residents in quality jobs, and only after the employees have found work will Connect Ohio receive the funding. The county will grant \$500 for each trainee who finds work that pays enough to lift their family above 150% of the federal poverty level, and another \$500 after the trainee has been employed for 3 months. Federal poverty guidelines vary depending on family size.

"Every person who sincerely desires to work should have an opportunity to do so," said Commissioner Paula Brooks. "We are hoping that this new approach will yield valuable results and will be mutually beneficial."

Connect Ohio is a subsidiary of Connected Nation, a national nonprofit that works to connect Americans to broadband internet service. It has worked in Ohio for more than 8 years, training more than 40,000 across the state on basic computer literacy, and has provided training and job placement similar to the new People Works program to more than 500 residents in Southern Ohio over the past 2 years.

"There are lots of Franklin County residents who want to work and to support their families, but who

are facing significant barriers, like a lack of education, childcare, transportation, or a criminal record," said Commissioner John O'Grady. "At the same time, there are local and national employers who are desperate for high quality entry-level customer service IT talent. Connect Ohio will bring the two together, providing a way for residents to work out of poverty."

Smart Works programs are supported by the county's economic development fund created by the temporary quarter-cent sales tax increase that went into effect in 2014. People Works and the Connect Ohio grant are administered by the commissioners' Economic Development and Planning department.

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